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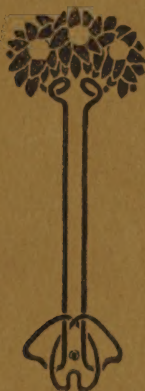
CINCINNATI MUSEUM

REVIEW NO. 5

CASHMERE SHAWLS

BY

MARGARET R. KING.





Section of a Cashmere Doschale showing border of Buthas, a simple Thal and a cream color ground.

Cashmere scarf or Schamlas with Butha design in Pala and white ground.

CINCINNATI MUSEUM

TEXTILES' SERIES No. 2.

CASHMERE SHAWLS

by

MARGARET KING

Originally printed in 1892

: 1921:

PREFACE

From the second edition.

A few years ago I was induced to put into print the result of some investigations I had made in the history and manufacture of "old Cashmere Shawls." The very small edition has been exhausted, and I have decided to make a second edition to meet the frequent demands for the little book by those who desire to study this beautiful art. It will be a handbook for the Cincinnati Museum, where can be found the best collection of rare "old Cashmere Shawls" certainly in this country, perhaps even the Museums of Europe can show nothing better. I am indebted for the information I have collected to Moorcroft, Vigne, Heeren, and Wakefield.

MARGARET R. KING.

CINCINNATI,
OCTOBER, 1892.

CASHMERE SHAWLS

The most graceful and beautiful article of woman's wear is the shawl. Decorative and flowing, it is the most universally suitable garment that can adorn a woman's form. The shawl is of oriental origin, where it is worn alike by men and women. By far the most complete fabric comes from the looms and handicraft of Cashmere,* "the unequaled" as the Persians call that favored land, a little country of Asia, situated just north of the Punjab, among the Himalaya Mountains, 5,000 feet above the level of the sea, with Thibet adjoining on the east and Bokhara, the supposed cradle of civilization, on the north-west. Among the highlands and mountains of this beautiful region are found the sheep and goats which produce the fine wool used in the manufacture of these shawls.

The "*old Cashmere shawl*" was the treasure in the wardrobe of our grandmothers, and happy the woman whose careful ancestor had preserved one to come down through the years to her descendants in all its softness and delicacy of coloring. In this artistic age of correct taste such an admiration has grown up for the essentially beautiful, that the long neglected old chests and closets have been ransacked and rummaged, and old shawls and old laces have been drawn forth from their lavender beds, once more to be admired and prized.

The general introduction of Cashmere shawls into Europe

*Kashmir is the oriental spelling of this word.

may be dated from the return of Napoleon Bonaparte from Egypt, where he had seen and admired and laid violent hands upon these beautiful garments so lavishly worn by the orientals. A furor sprung up among the women of the Empire, and no toilet was considered complete without the graceful folds of an oriental shawl.* Like all fashions this passed away, but, unlike the fate of the objects of frivolous taste, these beautiful fabrics were not destroyed nor bestowed upon the unappreciative, but carefully folded and put out of view, and from these stores are, without doubt, now drawn the exquisite textile wonders which have dropped upon us as if brought by a magician's wand.

Cincinnati is most especially fortunate, or rather the few elect among the women of Cincinnati are so, in finding themselves unexpectedly possessed of what before had been a dream or an image brought up after reading the Arabian Nights, or some magical tale of the more hidden orient.

A beautiful taste, a generous heart, and an ample purse, united to form the power of the magician who was the source of all this happiness to Cincinnati women. We do not wish to lift the veil to see from whence and how these treasures came. It would be a romance which would tell the history of all the shawls which came to the generous benefactor who knew well where to place them and where their beauties would be best appreciated. The soft texture, the harmony of coloring, are salient points in these oriental works of art,

*The Empress Josephine possessed over four hundred Cashmere shawls, and it is said (the authority being Mme. de Remusat) that one of the many weaknesses of the Emperor Napoleon was that he never wished to see the same shawl twice on the shoulders of his empress, and on more than one occasion in a rough manner tore the repeated shawl from her shoulders and dashed it in the fire.

but a deeper study will constantly develop new wonders of color and form.

To make the enjoyment of a Cashmere shawl perfect—how is it made? what are the different processes? and who are the people? are all questions which should be answered. Investigation has developed much to the writer, which is gladly dedicated to those fortunate ones who possess the inestimable treasure—

“An Old Cashmere Shawl.”

But little mention is made of this beautiful vale of Cashmere in early historical records, but the traditions of the people make their importance and civilization of great antiquity. An early historical writer mentions a race in Northern India which certainly refers to the inhabitants of Cashmere—“people of fair complexion and beautiful in form and feature.” Reference is also made to the loom work of “splendid colors and brilliancy,” which, without doubt, indicates those precious shawls, the most prized decoration, not only of the ladies of the West but much more so of the other sex in the East.

The shawl has a greater antiquity than any other garment. The most important manufacture of the Cashmere shawl was in the reign of Akbar, about the year 1556.

Heeren speaks of the “Happy Valley, as this fairy land is denominated throughout the East—the peaceful inhabitants sheltered for centuries from the revolution which devastated the rest of Asia. It is environed on all sides by a chain of mountains covered with perpetual snow, and can be approached only by two defiles on the bank of the Behud, which flows through its valley. The soil seems to have been deposited by the stream, which at some distant period was

arrested here and converted the whole valley into a lake, till it found at last an exit toward the South, in which direction the waters descend to join the Indus. The mud thus deposited, like that of the Nile, has become a soil which abundantly recompenses the husbandman. The height of the surrounding mountains defends the vale of Cashmere from the periodical rains which deluge the rest of India, and the lofty peaks are surmounted by the lighter and more feathery clouds which float in the upper regions of the atmosphere, and which descend in gentle showers, forming innumerable cascades, which precipitate themselves on all sides from the lofty and romantic walls of rock which encompass the valley and contribute to swell the stream by which it is divided. Protected by its peculiar position the fortunate valley suffers neither from the heat which prevails in the flats of Hindustan, nor feels the cold of the surrounding mountains. The fertile soil produces all the fruits known in temperate climes, and enjoys a perpetual spring, of which the nations of the North know nothing, except in the dreams of the poets."

For seven hundred years the Cashmerians have been followers of Mahomet, but evidences exist of a purer religion and higher civilization in the past. "Cashmere, although a part of India is not India. It has interests of a very different nature for the antiquarian, the architect, the geologist. Its monarchs have led their conquering armies to the subjugation of India, Ceylon, Thibet and even to parts of China." A people must have had a past of culture to have reached the perfection of handicraft which still exists among them. Not only in the textile fabrics are they so skilled, and no nation has ever excelled the people of this valley in its beautiful shawls and carpets, but in carvings of wood and ivory, inlaid work in woods and mother of pearl, delicate painting,

etc., they have always had and even now in their depressed condition still have a high degree of excellence. Advantages must have come to them from a civilized past, and with this the advantage of environment has lent its aid. Never were people more blest in soil, climate, and productions—fruits and flowers of the highest excellence and beauty, the floating gardens, the lakes, covered with blooming water plants, the flat house tops used as flower gardens. As the mountaineer descended from his home in the lofty fastnesses which entirely surround the vale of Cashmere, this beautiful sight met his eyes, and may have suggested the idea of that charming combination of color which is expressed in the “old shawls”.

“The women of Cashmere to this day, notwithstanding hardships and privation, are a beautiful race, and are handsome enough to induce the exclamation, ‘Who would despise a people that have among them such women?’ Their beauty is what would be called the Jewish type, but rather might we say the Jews are of the Oriental type.

“The roses of Cashmere are even finer than the roses of Persia, and the rose water of Cashmere is far famed. A beautiful festival, the Feast of Roses, occurs about the first of May, when the plum trees and roses are in full bloom. The lotus, with its noble pink and white blossom, is very abundant and forms such a carpet over the lakes that the water hens walk freely about as if on dry ground without a fear of being immersed. Fountains abound and impart a delicious coolness to the air. The wild apricot trees, which bloom in the early spring, fill the air with delicious fragrance, and the Cashmerian will come from afar to inhale it.”

Such is the home of the old Cashmere shawl, and from these beautiful surroundings, and as the expression of a noble

race, come to us these dreams of beauty.

The word shawl is derived from the native appellation of this graceful garment, *schal*. The wool which is used in the manufacture is of two kinds—the fleece of the domestic goat called *pasham schal* (or shawl wool) and that of the wild goat, wild sheep, and other animals, called *Asali Tus*.*

At one time the supply of wool was limited to the provinces of *Lesse* and *Ladikkh*, but later large quantities were furnished by the great Kurghis Hords.

The preparation of the wool for the spinner is a very delicate operation. Much care is taken to separate the wool from the hair, for only the soft, delicate wool next the skin, which corresponds to the down of the eider-duck, is used for the fine shawls.

When the goat or sheep is sheared the long hair is first taken off, and is used for coarser fabrics and for making rope. The *pasham* for the shawl is taken from the animal by combing, and is more readily disengaged by combing from the tail to the head.

Soap is never used in cleansing, as it is said to make the wool harsh and hard. In Hindustan, the shawl wool is washed with soap, which accounts for the fabrics of India failing to have the delicate softness of those of Cashmere. Husked rice is steeped in cold water until it becomes soft, when it is ground upon a stone slab to a fine consistence. It is then put between the layers of picked wool, which are squeezed

*The fine wool necessary for those soft and delicate shawls is a provision of nature to animals living in the highest regions, and the mountains around the vale of Cashmere seem to combine advantages over any other region for the production of this wool. Napoleon Bonaparte imported some of these goats into France, and a public spirited citizen of Essex county, England also introduced them, but in both instances the wool deteriorated, and the goats were allowed to die out.

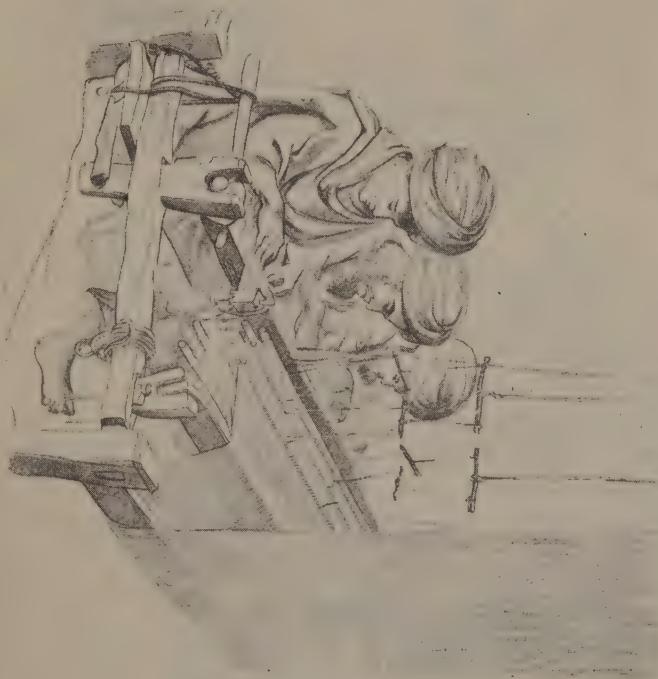
with the hand until the wool is completely saturated with the mixture. After thus being treated, the wool is shaken and picked out and made into square pads called *Tumbu*. In this process the *Phiri* or second best wool is extracted, as only the finest is used for the best shawls. The *Phiri* is used for inferior shawls and for a coarse cloth, much used by the natives, called *Patu*. The *Tumbu* is then worked out in flat rolls, about half a yard long, and is folded up and deposited in a deep pot of red earthenware called *Taskas*, where it is left out of the way of dust or accident till required for the spinning wheel. The wheel is constructed on the same principle as those used in Hindustan. It varies in finish. The rudest and cheapest is the *Takstidar*, the most serviceable the *Katsker*, and the best finished the *Pakhchedar*, used only by those who spin for amusement.

By an arrangement of the spindles and arms a soft elastic movement is produced, which insures evenness and prevents the thread from breaking. The yarn is doubled and formed into twists the length required for the warp of a shawl.

Girls begin to spin at the age of ten, and one hundred thousand females were employed in the occupation in Cashmere. About one-tenth of the number were supposed to spin for the purpose of obtaining shawls for their own use and nine-tenths for their livelihood. After selecting the pattern the yarn is portioned according to the color and put in the hands of the dyer. If the body of the shawl is to be plain the finest wool is set aside for the center and the *Phiri* or seconds is sent to the dyers, the coarser being used for the figures and flowers, giving a raised appearance to the embroidery. The dyer prepares the yarn by steeping it in cold water and professes to give sixty-four tints. Each color has a special name; for instance, the scarlet is termed *Gulinar*

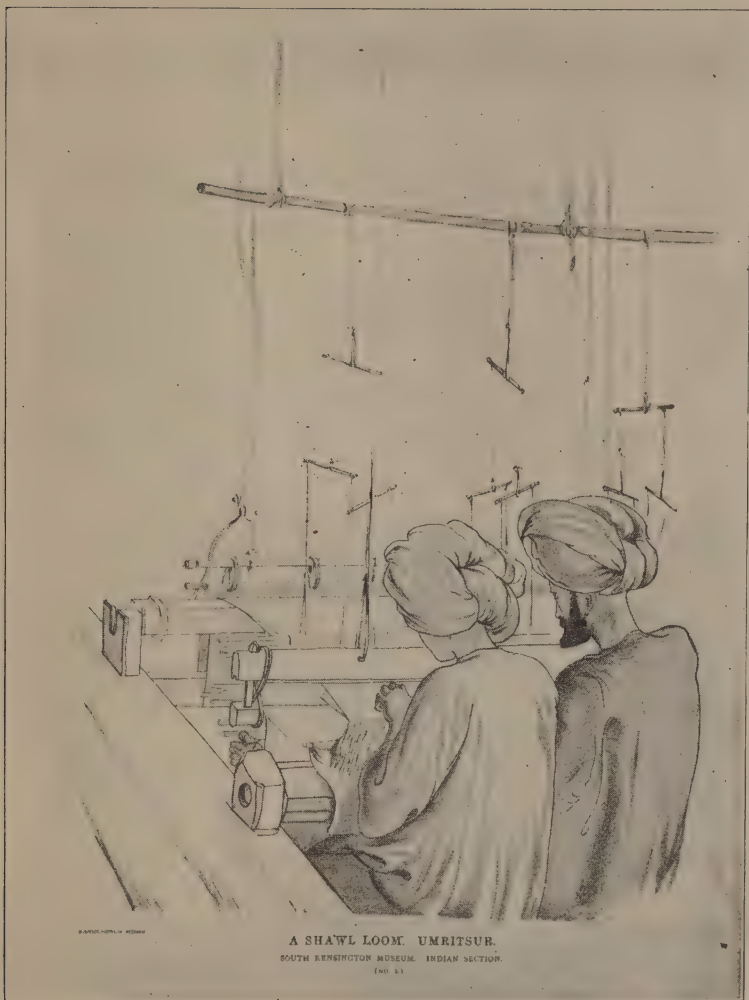
(pomegranate flower). The best red is derived from cochineal, imported from Hindustan. Logwood is used for other red dyes. Blues and greens are dyed with indigo or coloring matter extracted from European broadcloths by boiling.

Carthamus and saffron grow in the provinces and furnish coloring for the various tints of orange, yellow, etc. The occupation of the dyer was invariably hereditary. The whiter and finer the wool of which the yarn is made, the more capable it is said to be of taking a brilliant color; for this reason the white wool of the goat is preferred to that of the sheep—peculiar brilliancy is said to be imparted to color by the slanting rays of the setting sun. The *Nakatu* arranged the yarn for the warp and for the weft; that for the former is doubled and cut the proper lengths for a shawl. The number of these lengths vary from two thousand to three thousand, according to the closeness or openness of the texture, and the fineness or coarseness of the yarn. The weft is single and is estimated to weigh about half of the warp or woof. The *Nakatu* receives the yarn in hanks and returns it in balls. The warp is taken by the warp-dresser, is stretched, the thread being slightly separated, and is dressed by dipping it in boiled rice water. This process gives a certain stiffness or body. Silk is generally used for the warp on the border of a shawl. It has the advantage of showing the darker colors of the dyed wool more prominently than a warp of yarn, and moreover hardens and strengthens the border of the cloth. Where the border is narrow it is woven with the body of the shawl. When broad it is worked on a separate loom and sewed on the edge afterwards by the *Rafugar* or fine-drawer with such nicety that it is difficult to detect the union. The operation of drawing the warp through the heddles is done in the same way as in Europe. The weavers were all males, commencing



A SHAWL LOOM. IMRITSUB.
SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM. INDIAN SECTION.
1882.

Drawing by J. Lockwood Kipling.
South Kensington Museum Publication.



A SHAWL LOOM. UMRITSUR.
SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM. INDIAN SECTION.
(no. 5.)

Drawing by J. Lockwood Kipling.
South Kensington Museum Publication.

to learn at ten years, the same age at which the girls begin to learn to spin.

Shawls are always made in pairs, and an ordinary pair will occupy three weavers for three months, a rich pair will occupy a shop for eighteen months. The loom does not differ in principle from the European loom. A *Usted* or master workman has from two to three hundred in a shop, and they are generally crowded together in long, low apartments.

When the warp is fixed in the loom, the pattern drawer and persons who determine the portion of yarn of different colors are again consulted. The first brings the drawing of the pattern in black and white. The *Taragaru*, having well considered it, points out the disposition of colors—beginning at the foot of the pattern and calling out the color and the number of threads to which it is to extend, that by which it is to be followed, and so on in succession till the whole pattern has been described.

From his dictation, the *Talimgaru* writes down the particulars in characters or short-hand and delivers a copy of the document to the weavers.

The workmen prepare the *tujis*, or needles, by arming each with colored yarn. These needles without eyes are made of light, smooth wood, slightly charred to prevent roughness from working. The face, or right side of the cloth, is placed next the ground—the work being carried on on the back or reverse, on which the needles hang in a row, numbering from four hundred to fifteen hundred, according to the lightness or heaviness of the embroidery. The cloth of shawls generally is of two kinds—one plain of two threads, one twilled or of four. The former was, in past times, wrought to a great degree of fineness, but later has been less in demand. Two persons have to be employed to weave

the cloth shawl width. One throws the shuttle from the edge as far as he can across the warp, which is usually half way. It is then seized by the second weaver, who throws it on to the opposite side and returns it to his companion, who in turn forwards the shuttle. The cloth is often irregular, and when the texture is open it can be remedied by the introduction of additional threads—but there is no cure for that which is closer and more compacted. Occasionally pieces of cloth are found perfect in their regularity of texture. The higher the price, and the more elegant the border of the shawl, the more apt the structure of the cloth to be irregular. The edge of the warp is filled with the heavy thread of the *Phiri*, charged also with color, and to bring this into line the body of the cloth suffers. Foreign merchants are often so displeased with the irregularity of the field, that they cause the center to be removed and a new middle of even cloth to be inserted.

When the shawls are finished they are submitted to the *Purusgar*, or cleaner, whose business it is to free the shawl from discolored hairs or yarn, and from ends or knots, which they do with tweezers on the reverse side of the cloth. The purchaser takes the goods unwashed, and often in pieces, and the fine-drawer and washer-woman have still their duty. The washing is done with clear, cold water, using soap very cautiously to white parts alone, and never to embroidery. Colored shawls are dried in the shade, white ones are bleached in the open air, and their color is improved by exposure to fumes of sulphur. After the shawls are washed they are stretched in a manner answering somewhat to calendering. A wooden cylinder in two parts is employed for this purpose, round which the shawl is folded and carefully wrapped, being occasionally damped to make it fold tighter. The end is

sewed down, then two wedges are gradually driven between the two parts of the cylinder, at the open extremities, so as to force them asunder; then the shawl is stretched as tightly as its texture will admit. The shawl remains in this state for two days, when it is perfectly dry, and is unwrapped and put in a press before packing.

The worked shawl, or *Doschali Amri*, is worked entirely by needles with eyes, and with a particular kind of woollen thread. Woven shawls are made in separate pieces, and sewn together with such precision that the sewing is imperceptible. These are the most highly prized of the two.

Shawl manufacture is now the most important manufacture of the *Punjab*. Nearly a century ago, until which time it was almost entirely confined to Cashmere, a terrible famine occurred in this valley, and many of the shawl-weavers removed to the *Punjab*. The best shawls of the *Punjab* are made at *Umrizur*, but none can compare with those of Cashmere—because the *Punjab* manufactures are unable to obtain the finest wool; and, secondly, the inferiority in the dyeing, the excellence of which, in Cashmere, is attributed to some chemical peculiarity in the water. *Rampur* is a village in the *Sutlej* where the best wool is obtained, and the fabric made there is called the *Rampur Chudda*. A strict monopoly of best wool is kept in Cashmere.

The long shawl is called *Doschale*.

The square shawl, *Kussaba*.

The striped shawl, *Jama-wars*.

White ground, and green sprigs, *Alfidar*.

Scarfs are worn about the waists by Asiatics, and are called *Schamlas*.

The center of the shawl is called *Mittan*, and when covered with work the shawl is called *Poor Mittan*.

The ornaments of the shawl are distinguished by different names—*Pala*, *Haschia*, *Zanghir*, *Dhour*, etc.

Pala, whole embroidery at both ends.

Haschia, border at each side of the whole length.

Zanghir, the chain which runs above and below the principal mass of the *Pala*, and as it were confines it.

Dhour, or running ornaments, is situated in the inside in regard to the *Haschia* and the *Zanghir*, enveloping immediately the whole field.

Kunjbuttha, corner ornaments.

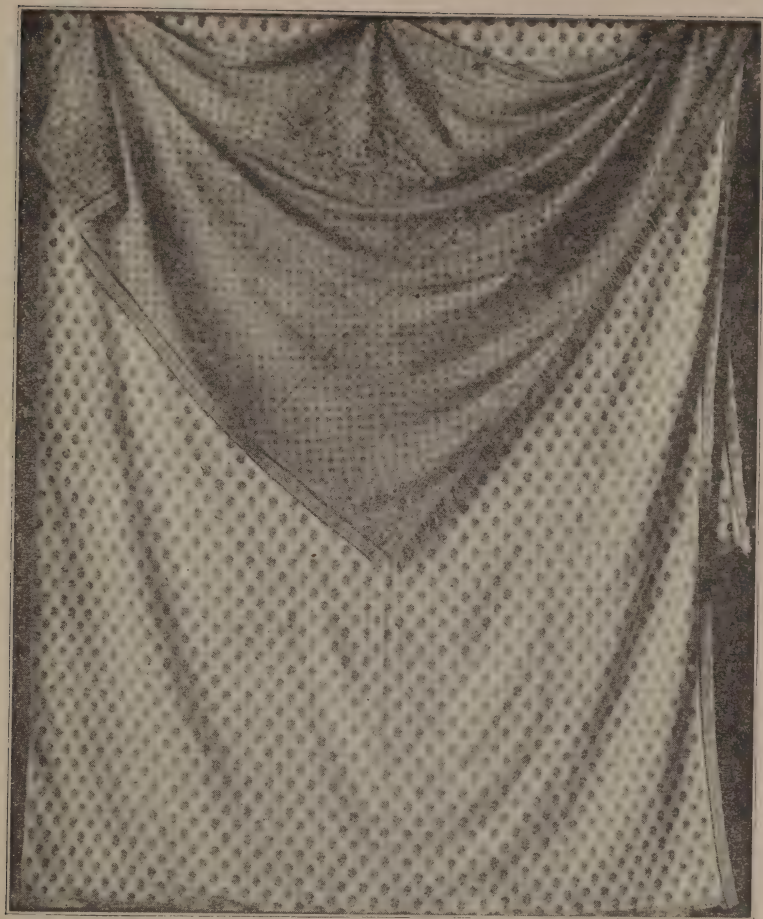
Butha is the generic term for flower, but is specifically applied to the large cone-like ornaments which form the most prominent feature of the *Pala*. Each *Butha* consists of three parts—the *Pai*, or foot, usually a pediment of leaves, *Shikam*, or body, and *Sir*, or head. The head may be either erect or curved. The *Thal* is the net-work which separates the different *Buthas*.

The carpets made in Cashmere are woven in the same manner as the shawls, and are called *Kahlin Pashminar*.

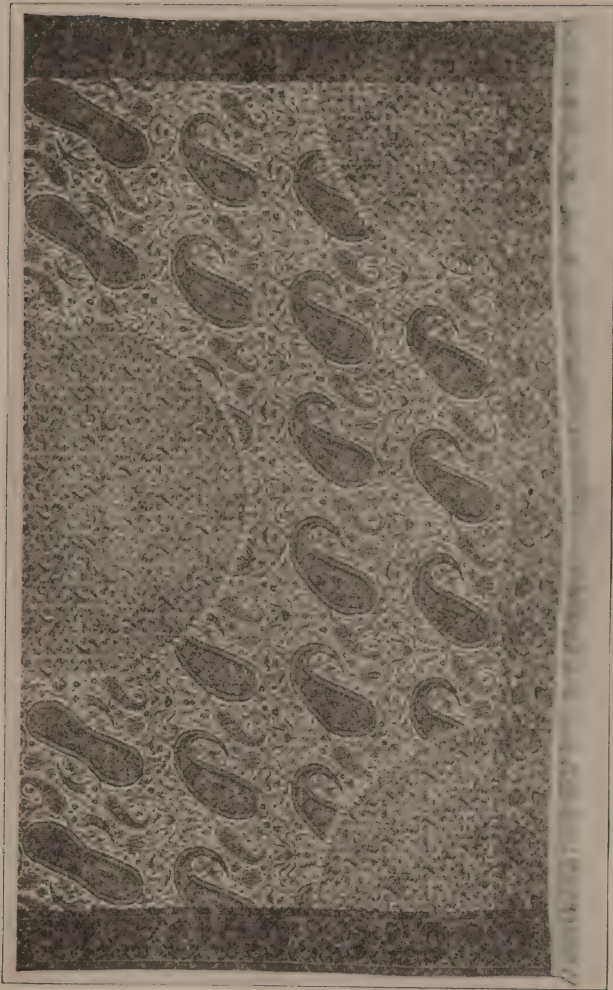
Oriental names for colors: White, *Sada*; crimson, *Goolauer*; black, *Mooshkee*; purple, *Orda*; blue, *Ferozee*; green, *Zingaree*; yellow, *Zurd*.

There has never been a time when the offering of a Cashmere shawl was not considered the rarest and most beautiful gift that could be made to woman; and now more than ever to be valued must such a gift be, when we consider that this once beautiful and lovely region—the poet's own land—is now desolated by tyranny and famine, the result of a treaty made by the English at the close of the first Sikh war, in 1846, which gave over the beautiful vale of Cashmere to a soldier of fortune, the tyrant Gholab Singh.*

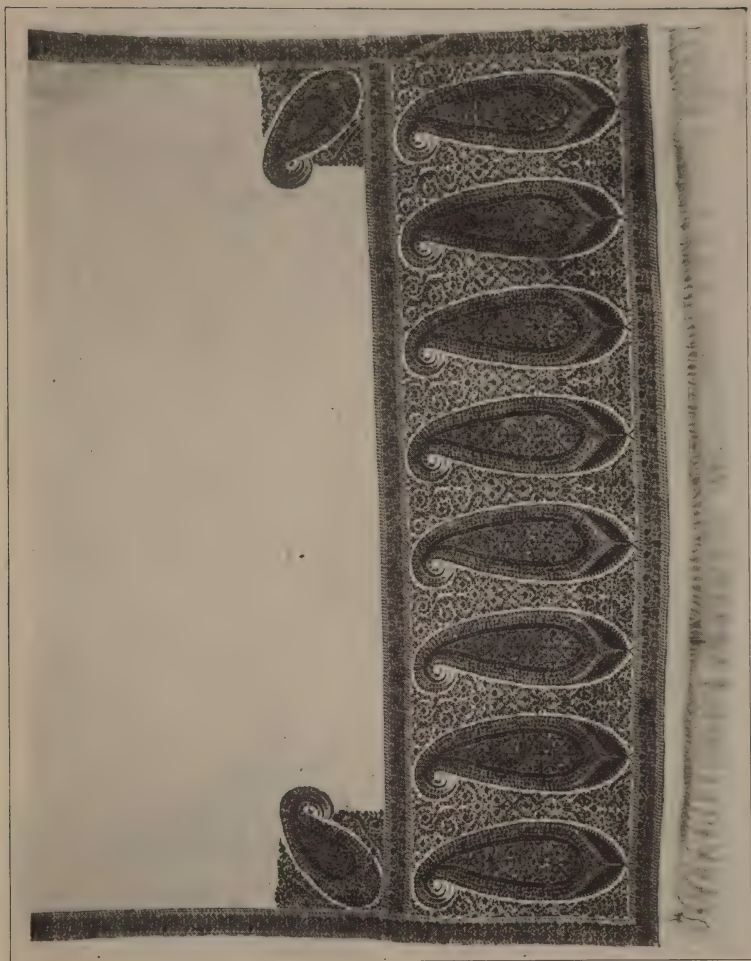
But, as early as the beginning of this century, the demand



A Doschale with all-over "pink" design on a white ground.
A Kussaba with center and corner ornaments and an all-over "pink" design on a yellow ground.



Section of Cashmere Kussaba or square shawl, with center covered with pattern, Poor Mittan.

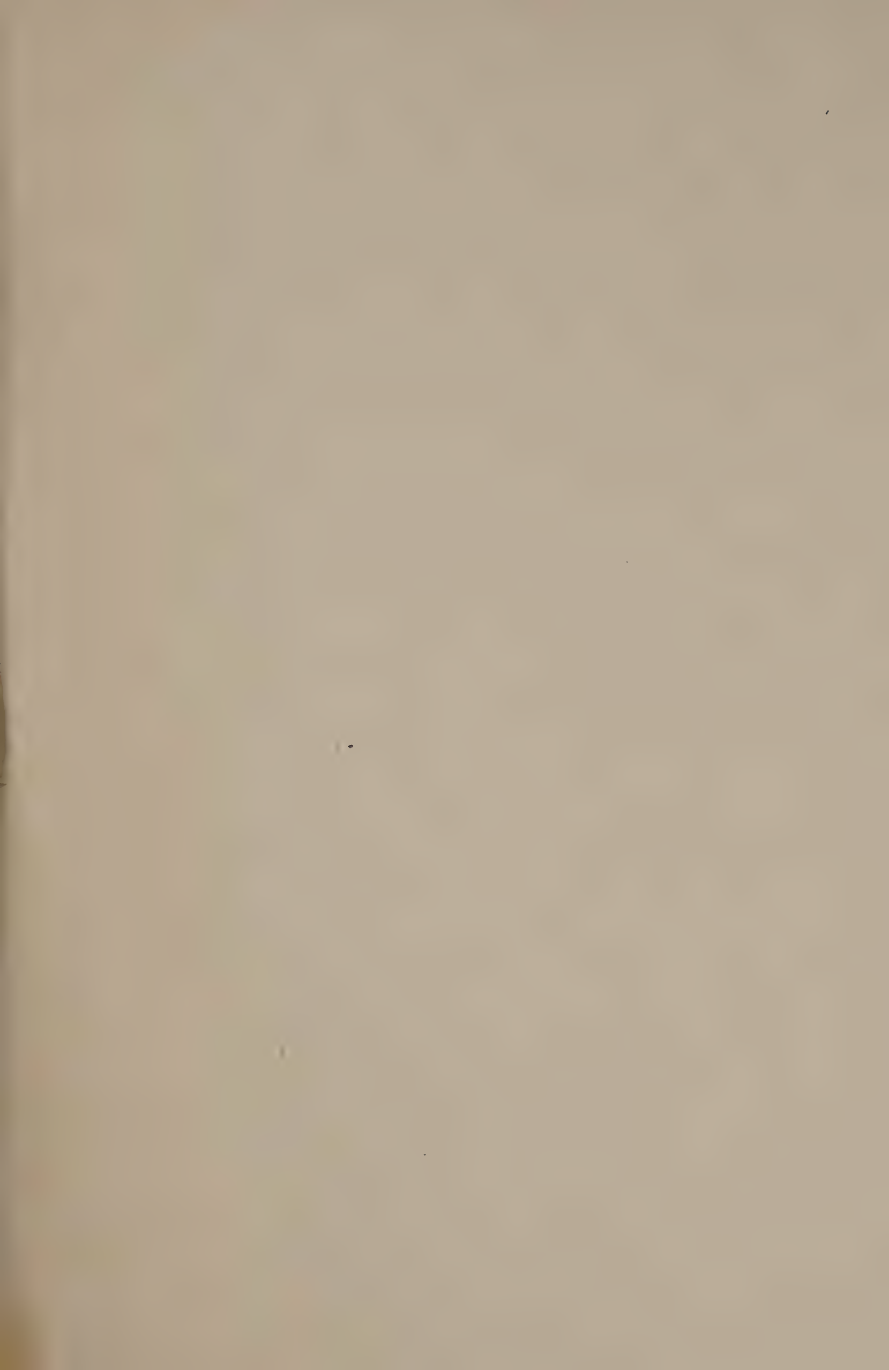


Section of a Cashmere Doschale or long shawl showing, Butha (probably date palm cone—variously called cone, pine, palm leaf, river loop, Persian flame, or tree of life) design, Kunj-butha, or corner ornaments and elaborate Thal or network which separates the different Buthas. The center of the shawl is cream color.

for Cashmere shawls was lessened by an action of the Persian government putting a duty upon the importation of these articles of luxury, and discouraging their use in every way, that their own brocaded and embroidered shawl might come into more general use.

Many causes have combined to crush this handsome race. Their looms are hushed; their artists, dispirited, have abandoned work—and, perhaps, never more will be revived in its former perfection the beautiful art which was the expression of a joyous race, living a life of gladness in a land of plenty—the land of the rose and the jasmine—mingling their merry laughter with the music of the nightingale and the silver babbling of the clear waters which descended with joyous bounds from the surrounding mountains. Therefore, all ye fortunate ones who possess an old Cashmere shawl—cling to it, cherish it, study its manifold beauties, and teach your children's children to reverence it.

* It is an interesting fact to know that in Article X of the Amritsar treaty is the following: "Maharajah, Golab Singh acknowledges the supremacy of the British government, and will in token of such supremacy present annually to the British government, one horse, twelve perfect shawl goats (six male and six female) and three pairs Kashmir shawls."





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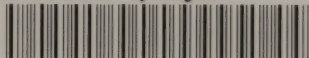
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